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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of sex role stereotyping in school readers, textbooks, workbooks, and reading materials used from kindergarten through college must first be recognized by students and teachers as well as by authors, illustrators, and publishers. Teachers should then work to foster environments and experiences in which females and males are equally endowed with strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, options, and potentials. A variety of approaches and exercises have been developed to accomplish this, such as analysis of books for sex role stereotyping, reading exercises which reverse conventional images of male and female, or research reports on subjects dealing with women inadequately covered in the textbook. Several sources offer suggestions for helping students and teachers focus on patterns of sex stereotyping and prejudice. (JM)

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Sex role stereotyping, considering individuals in terms of fixed ideas about them because of sex, is particularly insidious because it is so prevalent in readers, texts, workbooks, and reading aids used from kindergarten to college. In a study of basal readers, Saario, Jacklin and Title, found the following: stories contained more male characters than female characters; male and female adult characters were shown in different environments; there were marked differences in the types of behaviors performed by male and female child characters; the behavior of male child characters resulted in more positive consequences than did the behavior of female child characters; and as the basals changed from kindergarten to the third grade, the number of female characters declined and the stereotyped portrayal of male and female roles increased. (10). This study, based on 280 stories from basal readers from four major publishers, only scratches the surface of sexism that is so much a part of the schools.

In a more extensive study, Dick and Jane As Victims, 134 elementary school readers from 14 publishers used in three suburban New Jersey towns were examined. In a total of 2,760 stories, boy centered to girl centered

stories ran 5:2; the ratio of adult male main characters to adult female main characters was 3:1; male biographies to female biographies ran 6:1; and the ratio of male folk or fantasy to female folk or fantasy was 4:1. Particularly offensive according to the authors' findings was the scarcity of female biographical stories; there were 27 stories about 17 different women, but 119 stories about 88 men. (12).

Similar results were found when material used to improve and develop reading skills in the secondary schools in New York City was examined in terms of illustrations, sex of major character and sex of author. In one 2 volume set of 'contemporary' stories published by the New York City Board of Education with a total of 40 stories, males were prominent in 32 stories, while females appeared in 25 of these stories. But each story in which a female appeared, except for four, the story centered on a boy in which his family was featured; or the story was about a boy who was helped by a girl. In a vocabulary development series, with books on several levels, those on the higher levels contain no illustrations. Those on the lower level, but intended for older students, had two illustrations of women out of a

total of 11 illustrations: one showed a woman washing a boy's ear, and the other showed a woman fixing a cake. In a reading skill text with 33 illustrations, 13 were of males, 10 of animals, 8 of females, 2 of both male and female. In a well known series that attempts to improve reading in the subject areas, the words man, men, or mankind were invariably used where the word people was meant. In a section from one book in this series dealing with choosing a vocation, the choices given for women were teacher, typist, stewardess, and nurse; the choices given for men were scientist, computer technician, doctor, and farmer. In the book in this series meant to be used in the tenth grade, the section dealing with literature contained selections by three women writers out of 12 writers used. The one illustration in the section showed two girls walking to a subway talking about men!

The MacLeod, Silverman examination of eight textbooks used to teach U.S. government on a high school level indicated the following: 70-88% of the illustrations show men only or men dominant over women in status, authority or numbers; only 4-18% of the illustrations show women. (7). The authors emphasize that these books on

government fail to discuss individual women, fail to quote women, fail to use women's case histories as examples, and mention the female majority of the population only occasionally.

The major difference in the portrayal of females in books for the older reader, aside from a marked decrease in their appearance, is the portrayal of adolescent girls as being concerned only with boys or their appearance, and the almost exclusive portrayal of women as wives or "spinsters," as victims of or martyrs for men. This portrayal exists in the so-called teen age novels, in the Leoras and Antonias, in the Eves and Pandoras, in the poor little match girls and Sleeping Beauties.

Things read in books have a certain credibility even today. The social expectations conveyed to the student through books, expectations reenforced by the school structure, lead students to feel their behavior must meet these expectations. The student learns she is expected to reflect the standardized, sterile existence portrayed in books.

Where women are portrayed as engaging only in the so-called "womanly occupations," where there are no female

judges, jockeys or college presidents, students 'learn' what occupations they are expected to have. When stories show boys dreaming of becoming scientists, astronauts, adventurers in far off places, while girls play house, students 'learn' what the future is supposed to hold for them. When the male protagonist is usually clever, creative, resourceful, and brave, and the female protagonist is passive, helpful, and fearful, students 'learn' what kind of behavior is expected of them. The portrayal of the male as a multidimensional being pitted against or separated from the female who does not excel in anything but being kind and 'motherly' extends from kindergarten to college, from basal reader to workbook, to speller, to text and literary classics. It is this portrayal, as well as the omissions and numerical outnumbering, that tends to make girls and women less than people, and in so doing also debases the humanity of boys and men.

Awareness of a problem is the first step to its solution. Awareness, however, in and of itself, is not enough. Sexist attitudes and stereotypes need to be discussed and alternatives presented, otherwise the teacher and the text convey to students the belief that sexism is

socially acceptable rather than the prejudice it is.

Ideally the teacher should be able to have available reading materials and texts that present both male and female as fully realized human beings. Such texts and materials do exist, in limited numbers perhaps, in sources that may be off the beaten academic track. These range from Rosemary Winard's Womenfolk and Fairy Tales, to Women in American History by Gerda Lerner, through the forgotten classics such as Jane Austen's Emma, to those not considered such as Norma Klein's Sunshine. Suggested sources for these books are listed under references. (1), (5), (6), (12). Where appropriate books and materials are not yet available, awareness of what is needed can create a demand that publishers, writers, and illustrators will meet as they have in other areas of reading and literature such as the portrayal and inclusion of various ethnic and economic groups in the books now available.

However, even if appropriate and adequate books and materials were readily available, it is unrealistic to think that existing books and materials would be thrown out and replaced regardless of cost. What is needed, then, is a closer look at the books teachers and students use, books

that are so familiar that their content is taken for granted. What is also needed is to get the students involved in looking at these books more closely, too.

There are several sources that offer various suggestions for helping teachers and students focus on the pattern of sexism and stereotyping in readers and literature. A Child's Right to Equal Reading offers suggestions for beginning to speculate on the possibility of an alternative children's literature program supportive of sexual equality. (9). The Clearing House on Women's Studies offers a workbook and guide, "Discovering Sex Role Stereotypes," among other materials. (5). There are publications by different chapters of N.O.W. (2) and the guidelines published by McGraw-Hill and Scott, Foresman and Co. (3), (4).

Most effective, however, are the approaches and exercises that can be and have been developed by teachers and students on the basis of their knowledge and experience in teaching and learning. Some of these are listed:

Books students are using can be analyzed for sex role stereotyping using criteria that the teacher and students have developed.

Several statements can be read to the class, each dealing with a particular stereotype. Students then indicate their agreement or disagreement with each and explain why.

A reading exercise can be prepared in which the conventional images of male and female are reversed. Students are asked to respond to specific questions.

Students can be asked to follow a comic strip or TV program for two weeks and to summarize the treatment of male and female characters.

Students can be asked to make two collages depicting how they see men and how they see women. How and where they got their ideas can be the basis for discussion, vocabulary development and written composition.

Students can edit, revise or illustrate sections or chapters of textbook so that they exclude stereotypes and/or present a more inclusive portrayal of women. This exercise leads easily to various reading related skills including the use of the library.

Supplementary readings in other books, in current magazines and newspapers can be assigned. The different approaches used can be discussed.

Research reports can be assigned on subjects dealing with women inadequately covered in the text.

Living women who are breaking sex role stereotypes can be discussed and serve as the basis for a class project in writing biography or in doing interviews.

A heightened awareness can be brought to classroom management practices: The existence of special 'areas' for boys and girls needs to be reconsidered. The items displayed on walls needs to be examined for numerical representation as well as appropriateness in terms of stereotyping. The teacher's verbal cues for sex role behavior need to be reappraised. (These may extend from the "I need a strong boy to...," to the nature of reading sentences put on the board.)

Credit needs to be given where credit is due, and it may be necessary for teacher and students to do some 'homework.' For example, there is considerable evidence that the cotton gin was invented by Catherine Littlefield Greene, widow of General Nathaniel Greene, rather than by Eli Whitney.

Students need to be leveled with; they need to have pointed out that a particular book does not provide

appropriate material dealing with women so that they will be conscious of this fact when they read.

Above all, students need to be involved in all aspects of the effort to become more aware of stereotyping and conditioning. It is only through increased awareness and the knowledge of alternatives that attitudes, expectations and behavior can change. Even the behavior called 'intelligence' may be affected.

In a study of women's intellect, Macoby found that girls got off to a good start. They were even slightly ahead of boys intellectually for the first 3-4 years of life: they articulated more clearly than boys; they combined words into sounds sooner; they counted accurately sooner, etc. Consistent sex differences in intellect in which boys have the edge, did not appear until high school. (8). It may not be surprising that women end up where they are expected to, but it is surprising that it takes them so long to get the message!

Intellectual development, however, occurs as a response, not only to expectations (as Rosenthal has also shown in his experiments with I.Q. change), but also to the nature of interpersonal relations in which the child is

involved. The teacher is a pivotal part of this network.

The theme of this 20th annual conference, Reading: Re-Creating and Creating, is nowhere more appropriate than in this area--sexism and sex role stereotyping. In fostering environments and experiences in which male and female are human beings equally endowed with all manner of strengths and weaknesses, capabilities, options and potentials, the teacher is creating the conditions not only for the development of readers and textbooks free of bias, but for the optimum development of reading as a skill, an interest and as a credible representation of reality.

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